Thick boots thumped to the beat of pulsing music while lights blared and swung around the warehouse. Bodies moved with the music and some to their own internal beat as over a hundred patrons created a sea of rubber. It was not the most secretive of jobs that had been offered to The Specialist, but it could be argued it was one of the easiest to blend in with. Thick, glossy rubber coated his frame while different faces and sights reflected off the lenses of his mask. It was a place people could lose themselves to more than just the music, the drugs, the sensations and…

…the clouding of thoughts. There it was again – even before he had made his way into the warehouse there was an aura around it, filtering out. It was weaker on the periphery but here? Here it permeated the air. ***He*** *was in the air and the push of sweet thoughts began to crowd out the barrage of noise coming…*

…back into focus. The music, the people, the air were as they should be once more. A shake of his jackal visage and he was on the move once more. The client had warned that there would surely be some issues, but none he could not handle. Hallucinations, sensory assaults, distortions to reality – that was included in the brief. The rest of the pictures were mostly his nests and dens security teams had found. Only one proper picture existed of the target – it appeared to be one he had taken himself. A smile full of fangs with grey braids framing the face and the suggestion of horns. Towards the bottom of the picture had been the face of the last believed victim looking up with a mix of terror and panic.

The door out to the halls behind the main room swung open and immediately the pressure from the raucous club died down, only to be replaced by something different. Something more invasive. It was far less crowded here – the occasional gimp walking by with a curious look, a woman in a stylized demon suit and face paint that blew a kiss. The Specialist was not concerned with the others making their way in and out of rooms – he was concerned with his target. End of the room behind a red door, the client had said. He had wanted to ask why she knew the degree of detail she knew, but common sense and professional courtesy held his tongue. She had been there and she wanted revenge, that much was clear.

What's clear? *The voice slithered into his mind as the hall pulled itself back, the red door slowly diving deeper as the stench of embers and sweet smoke thickened the air.* **Is it those lenses? Maybe the layers under your suit are translucent. I am going to find out. I am going to peel them off and find out what makes you hum and thump.** The Specialist leaned forward, planting a hand on the door and pausing for a moment – nothing should be invading his suit, much less his mind. All of it was inviolate, yet that thing had touched his mind. What had it seen? The door opened suddenly and a force without origin yanked his form forward inside as the door slammed behind.

Sensation felt like it was battering reality with a cudgel inside. Sounds smelled, sights could be felt…and the taste in the air? Smoke threaded the air, rising from

hanging bronze censors situated around the morass of bodies. Every single one clad in dark, black, seamless rubber. Some faces were blank, some wore masks, some had eyes that spoke how far gone they were. There was no rhyme or reason to how they were restrained, though they all seemed to pulse and move with the room and the air.

“Tut tut…” Soft grey fingers tilted the masked visage upwards, reflecting horns, bronze chains and purple eyes as Valdera slowly lowered himself down. “Strong and sturdy – I frankly don’t know how you’re still conscious but I commend you for the efforts.” His limbs failed to move past throbs and tensed muscles. “I heard you don’t talk much – that your actions are what you communicate by.” The Princeling pushed his fingers around his neck, lifting him effortlessly and smiling as sweet as cyanide. “Hell is such a misunderstood concept. Seen as a place instead of a state and even then it’s not what all those tales and stories suggest.

Would you care to see it?

The room, the figures, even the smoke were gone. Black marble shot through with silver and copper veins surrounded the Specialist. A large bed sat occupied by two fingers that seemed to drift *just* out of view when he tried to focus on them. Moving was not much of an option as fat links of iron clanked loudly when he pulled on his limbs. Fitted with heavy manacles and shackles around wrist and ankle, there was no leaving the spot he was anchored to. **Leaving really isn’t in the cards at all, is it?** Valdera’s voice pushed itself back into his mind as his hand pushed a little at the broad, glossy chest. “Strong as you are silent.” It was a weak goad, but he was feeling playful. He was always playful with new toys, and this one truly fascinated him. With a significant deal of force and resources expended, he could get it open, but such a sacrilegious act appealed little to the demon.

The yellow highlights…
The glossy sheen of the black rubber…
The thick boots and leering jackal mask…

“Pride.” The Specialist snapped the chain holding his hand in a fluid motion and caught the demon around the throat while he had been distracted by the quality of his plaything’s suit and gear. It had been one of the few things his employer had told him. With a heave and a turn, Valdera smacked into the side of the bed, chains from the Prince’s horns jingling softly in stark contrast to the snap of iron that shouldn’t have been able to break as The Specialist walked forward, opening that gooey maw to reveal the yellowish, heady fumes that quickly poured out. They raced and flooded over the Prince halfway through a spoken spell that made his lips and fingers go numb while the other two figures were quickly enveloped as well. A few coughs and a demonic swear as Valdera fell to his hands and knees, feeling his magic neutered as much as his body and mind were.

“This is not some light snatch and grab. This is lethal in every sense of the word.” The wad of papers smacked into the table, dropped there by the customer as they

motioned to a board behind them that looked like the ravings a lunatic. Sigils, bronze-age jewelry, swatches of bright colors and a security camera still shot that showed horns, glowing purple eyes…and when you moved a certain way, an open mouth full of fangs. “You will have a better chance than most due to your own capabilities and what has been collected over the past three months. My personal advice? Don’t engage it too much – talking will be your doom.”

Valdera spat and growled, thumping his fists on the ground as his unholy biological systems attempted to expel the fumes as the thuds of boots grew closer. “Pride. Colors. And here, in your own realm where you can let the walls down.” He stopped and reached down with a rubber hood that looked too tight for comfort come down over his horns through hole sin them and engulf his head, silencing his swears and any further speech. A hand reached up, knocked away and pinned under the boot while his features fell under unyielding rubber. A single push around the mouth sunk and activated the sphere once past his lips, inflating and muffling any further troubles or just the annoying cadence of his tone. With the main threat neutralized for the moment, his eyes drifted up to the other two figures on the bed and suddenly the thought to bring spare containment hoods felt like divine providence…

Valdera woke in a start, shifting forward a few inches before being stopped by unseen – though very felt – means. That hood and gag were still in place so traditional vision was out of the question. From a tactile standpoint, he knew it was a thick coating of rubber on his frame from head to toe. A heavy posture collar forced his head upwards and the suit and hood had been somehow connected while he was unconscious. Clingy and thick rubber cuffs wrapped his ankles that were fastened by short chains on either side of them to the ground. Cuffs around his thighs kept separating them more than an inch out of the question. Cuffs around his biceps were connected by a bar behind his back, while those around his wrists were fastened to the sides of a belt on his hips. A harness around his chest kept him fastened by short chains to the wall of wherever he was. A few pulls told him what he feared – consecrated material on top of whatever this one used.

The visage of the open-mouthed jackal suddenly imposed itself onto his mind, sending the Prince backwards into the wall.

“Did you really think a subtle touch would win the day?” His voice sounded clear through the rubber around his head and close enough that the gush of fumes from the mask were not needed to tell they were face to face. Every chain snapped taut as Valdera leaned forward, but all he received was a pat on the head and then a squeeze to the glossy nulge between his legs that sported the familiar glowing ankh. A low groan and a relaxing of the tension in the chains as The Specialist looked to either side of his quarry. Two identical figures with color-coded bands around their horns helped keep them all in order. Three demons in one. If one was captured or injured, they could be made whole. They were identical biologically from preliminary tests, but so different in others.

A soft chorus of grunts, rubber squeaking and chains clanking softly were all they offered as the jackal-faced professional went back to view several metal tables with a variety of rubber suits, sheets, masks, restraint gear…the cannisters of liquid rubber alone took up an entire table. He would make contact soon enough with the client. But good research was not something to be passed up. Nor was the opportunity of having three new sphinxes for his home…